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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAY 7953
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 3712
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 9023
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0315
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN PRIORITY 0125
RUEHQQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 4349
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 3162
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1095
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 004059

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/05/2016

TAGS: PTER PGOV PREL CO

SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY GUARANTORS IN GOC-ELN PEACE PROCESS
PREPARE PROPOSAL, SAY U.S. INTEREST VITAL

REF: BOGOTA 3701 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Five of the six civil society guarantors in the GOC-ELN exploratory peace talks told Polcouns on May 5 they were preparing a proposal to present to the parties prior to the fourth round of talks, likely to take place after the May 28 presidential election. The proposal would be crafted as a "humanitarian" text that addressed the concerns of both sides and helped to start the fourth round in a positive way. The ELN remained interested in moving the talks from Cuba (and the guarantors supported such a move) but the GOC seemed committed to Havana. The guarantors considered their role to be positive and important, but noted apparent concerns shared by the three "accompanying countries" (Spain, Norway, and Switzerland) and Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo over the ELN's increasing contacts with other diplomatic representatives. The guarantors said U.S. interest in the talks was vital and suggested the U.S. attend a meeting the Medellin "House of Peace" would organize for the diplomatic corps (either in Medellin or Bogota) with ELN negotiator Francisco Galan. End summary.

Guarantors Working on Proposal for GOC and ELN

¶2. (C) The five guarantors (Moritz Akerman, Alvaro Jimenez, Alejo Vargas, Gustavo Ruiz, and Carlos Rodriguez; sixth guarantor Father Horacio Orango was absent) told Polcouns and D/polcouns during a lunch they requested on May 5 that they were working on a "humanitarian" proposal for the GOC and ELN under the auspices of the "House of Peace" in Medellin. A similar effort had led to the ELN announcing support for the March 12 Congressional elections. The guarantors anticipated presenting the proposal to the parties prior to the fourth round of talks, which have not yet been scheduled (but are likely to take place after the May 28 presidential election). The guarantors envisage a proposal attractive to both sides.

The guarantors would insist the ELN commit to a significant gesture related to kidnappings and demining, and would urge the GOC to address the concerns of communities displaced by violence, and promote more extensive rural development in demined areas. In this way, they suggested, both sides would gain and the fourth round would start in a positive way. Jimenez said it was important to link a demining program in areas of historical ELN influence with a specific GOC effort to improve lives in such areas. Akerman said the ELN might be willing to make a "unilateral" gesture but would be sensitive to the perception that it was doing so under GOC pressure, hence the value of the "House of Peace" proposal.

ELN Central Command Still United

¶13. (C) According to Akerman, the ELN's Central Command (COCE) remains united and committed to the peace talks. Akerman suggested, however, that the ELN would be careful to build a consensus among its leadership and other key personnel before agreeing to any guarantor or GOC proposal.

Cuba and the FARC

¶14. (C) According to the guarantors, the ELN remains anxious to move the talks from Cuba. The ELN apparently considers a European venue to be unrealistic but encouraged the guarantors to explore a venue in Panama. Akerman said GOC Peace Commissioner Restrepo "listened in silence" to the Panama option. The guarantors regard the GOC's interest in a Cuba venue as strong, in part because it enables the GOC to deny the ELN media exposure in Cuba's stifling political environment, and in part to assist President Uribe to show that he is not so allied to the U.S. Akerman and Jimenez said Cuban Communist Party officials have been active in promoting the line that talks with the ELN cannot be allowed to move forward without a parallel process with the FARC. (The guarantors are less sure that Fidel Castro also holds this position.)

Guarantors and "Accompanying Countries"

¶15. (C) Akerman explained that the communique from the third round of talks, which ended one day early on April 28, referred to the continuing importance of the guarantors' role, and supported the participation of the "international community" in the process. The guarantors believe they have a positive influence on the parties and intend to press both sides to come to the table to address a substantive agenda for the fourth round. With regard to the "accompanying countries" (Spain, Norway, and Switzerland), the guarantors have detected differences of opinion between them on their roles and on the possible expansion of countries who assist the process. They suggested that "accompanying country" disagreements, for example, led to the Papal Nuncio (as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps) declining to move forward with plans for an ELN meeting with the diplomatic corps before the third round; the guarantors implied that the "accompanying countries" opposed such a meeting because it would dilute their own importance. (Per reftels, the likelihood of an ELN meeting with the diplomatic corps also dimmed when Antonio Garcia decided not to come to Bogota during his brief visit to Colombia. The Embassy had made clear to the Papal Nuncio, the Catholic Church, and others that we would attend such a meeting in Bogota at the counselor level.)

Restrepo Concerned

¶16. (C) According to Akerman and Jimenez, Restrepo is worried he is losing control over the contacts the ELN is making with

representatives of countries other than Spain, Norway, and Switzerland. Akerman said Restrepo was discomfited by Antonio Garcia's meeting with the Japanese Ambassador during his recent trip to Medellin, and about the increased interest shown by the Dutch Ambassador in developments. Restrepo apparently said he wanted to approve such contacts before they occurred, not learn about them afterwards. The guarantors planned to meet with Restrepo May 5 to discuss this and other issues.

Guarantors Reiterate Importance of U.S.

¶7. (C) The guarantors said U.S. interest in keeping abreast of the issues was vitally important. They said the ELN was aware of the U.S. interest and hoped it would continue. The guarantors appreciated the fact that the U.S. had not criticized the talks in public and instead had been supportive in private. They understood U.S. red lines on dealing with terrorists but argued it would be helpful for the U.S. to continue to show support, perhaps as part of an event held with the House of Peace (in Medellin or Bogota) for the diplomatic corps as a whole to meet with ELN negotiator Francisco Galan.

WOOD